



THE TRANSFORMERS SPOTLIGHT

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If there's a line, he'll cross it; if there's a knot, he'll cut it; if there's a risk, he'll take it... smiling. In his solitary world, there's no room for second thoughts, no margin for error. "Out there" is a permanent state of mind, and the more impossible, downright insane the mission, the better this daredevil AUTOBOT likes it. His name...

... IS HOT ROD.

THE TRANSFORMERS: SPOTLIGHT HOT ROD

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Special thanks to Hasbro's Aaron Archer, Elizabeth Griffin, and Richard Zambrano for their invaluable assistance.

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INEVITABLY, SOMEONE
ALWAYS SAYS, 'HOT ROD,
IT CAN'T BE DONE.'

IN THIS CASE...



...THERE'S NO WAY I SHOULD BE
ABLE TO MAKE IT DOWN TO THE
SURFACE OF THIS PARTICULAR
MOON WITHOUT BEING DETECTED
AND SHOT OUT OF THE SKY!



BUT IN MY BOOK, THERE'S
NO "CAN'T BE DONE."
THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY...

AND THE MORE
DOWNRIGHT INSANE
IT SEEMS...



...THE LESS ANYONE
WILL BE EXPECTING IT!

LEAVING MY "RIDE" TO IMPACT ON THE SURFACE, I FREEFALL, ALL BUT THE MOST ESSENTIAL SYSTEMS OFFLINE. JUST ANOTHER BIT OF SPACE DEBRIS.

I'M OUT ON MY OWN, UP AGAINST IMPOSSIBLE ODDS, MY LIFE—AND MY LIFE ALONE—ON THE LINE.

IT'S A RUSH!

NO WAY TO KNOW WHERE THE SENSOR BUFFER BEGINS AND ENDS, SO I LEAVE IT TO THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT...

...TO POWER UP
AND GENERATE
THE NULL FIELD.

EVEN SO...

...IT'S A FAR FROM
GENTLE LANDING.

I FLIRT WITH CRITICAL SYSTEM-SHOCK,
DIPPING IN AND OUT OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

I TRY TO FOCUS...
ON THE MISSION,
ON THE OBJECTIVE,
BUT INSTEAD...

I SLIP...

...ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE SILICON STEPPES OF KIALETA.

MY FIRST TIME IN OVERALL CHARGE OF A TACTICAL UNIT, MY ONE FAILURE. I'VE RE-LIVED IT, IN GRINDING STOP-MOTION, A THOUSAND TIMES.

WELCOME TO ONE THOUSAND AND ONE...

DISTANCE?

A KILO, MAYBE. CONDITIONS ARE PLAYING MERRY HELL WITH INSTRUMENTATION.

GUESS THAT'S WHY NO ONE BOthers TO MONITOR THIS VECTOR.

YOU WOULDN'T GET A READING WORTH SPIT, AND BEsIDES, NO ONE IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD ATTEMPT A CROSSING.

EXCEPT US.

HOLD IT! I THINK...

YES.

GO TO VOICE-COMM. WE'RE HERE.

UNLESS I MISS MY GUESS, THIS IS THE OUTER PERIMETER...

...OF THE OMEGA BUNKER.



RIGHT. BORE DRONES ONE AND TWO ARE IN POSITION. LET'S GO TO WORK...

GIZMO?

I'LL HAVE THE HOLOMATTER PROJECTOR UP AND RUNNING IN JUST A FEW NANO-KLIKS. STAND BY...



BACKBEAT?

SETTING LOW-YIELD CHARGES.
TIMERS ARE SYNCED
WITH GIZMO'S
HOLOPROGRAM.



DEALER?

DROPSHIP
UPLINK ALIGNED
AND LOCKED.

HAVE BORE
DRONE THREE
LOCK ONTO MY
POSITION AND
BACKTRACK.



ACKNOWLEDGED.

THOSE THINGS THAT LOOK LIKE STATUES, THEY'RE THE OMEGA GUARDIANS, RIGHT?

RIGHT.

WE DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT THEM, JUST THAT THEY'RE VERY OLD, PROBABLY LEFT BEHIND BY WHATEVER RACE BUILT THE BUNKER, AND THEY'LL DEFEND THE MAGNIFICENCE WITH EVERY BIT OF LETHAL FORCE THEY POSSESS, WHICH, BY THE WAY, IS CONSIDERABLE.

THE TRICK, THEREFORE, IS TO GET THIS DONE CLEAN, IN AND OUT WITHOUT A FIREFIGHT.

OKAY...

...IT'S SHOWTIME!

I WAS SO FULL OF ZEAL, GUNG-HO TO THE MAX. I WONDER...

...IF THAT'S WHAT GOT THEM KILLED.

SLOWLY, SURELY, THE PAST RECEDES, PRESENT—AND PRESSING—CONCERN COMING INTO FOCUS.



GETTING DOWN HERE, WAS—RELATIVELY SPEAKING—THE EASY PART. NOW...



...I HAVE TO GET IN.

STYX. OF ALL THE DECEPTICON PENAL COLONIES, THIS IS THE HARSHEST, THE MOST PUNISHING. LIFE EXPECTANCY IS NOT HIGH.

IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE IMPREGNABLE, WHICH, AS IT HAPPENS, IS JUST ONE OF MANY WORDS...

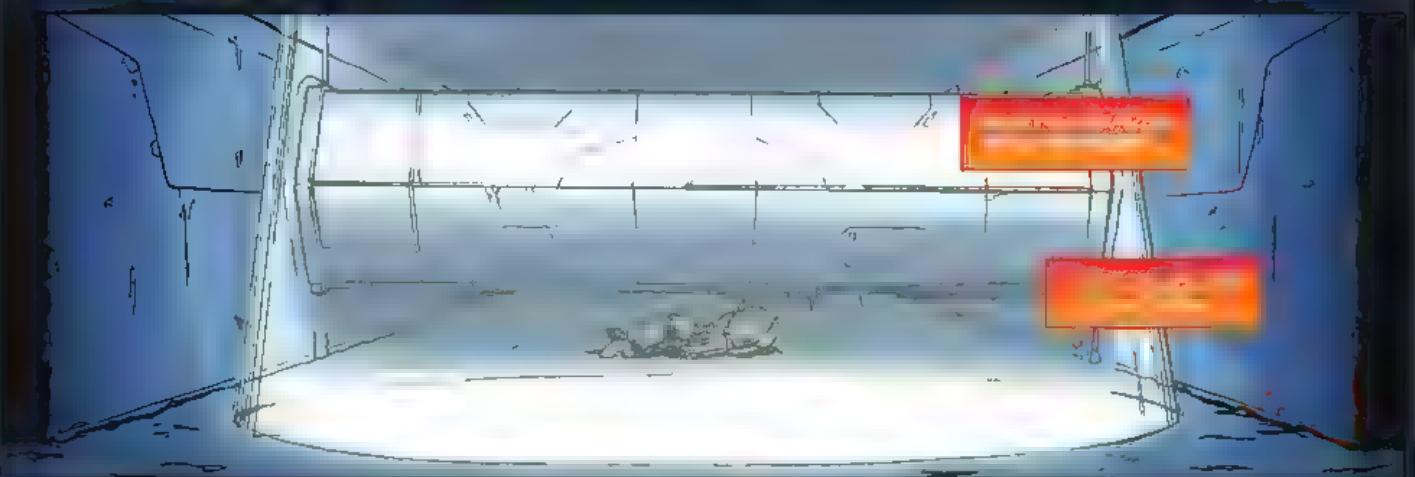
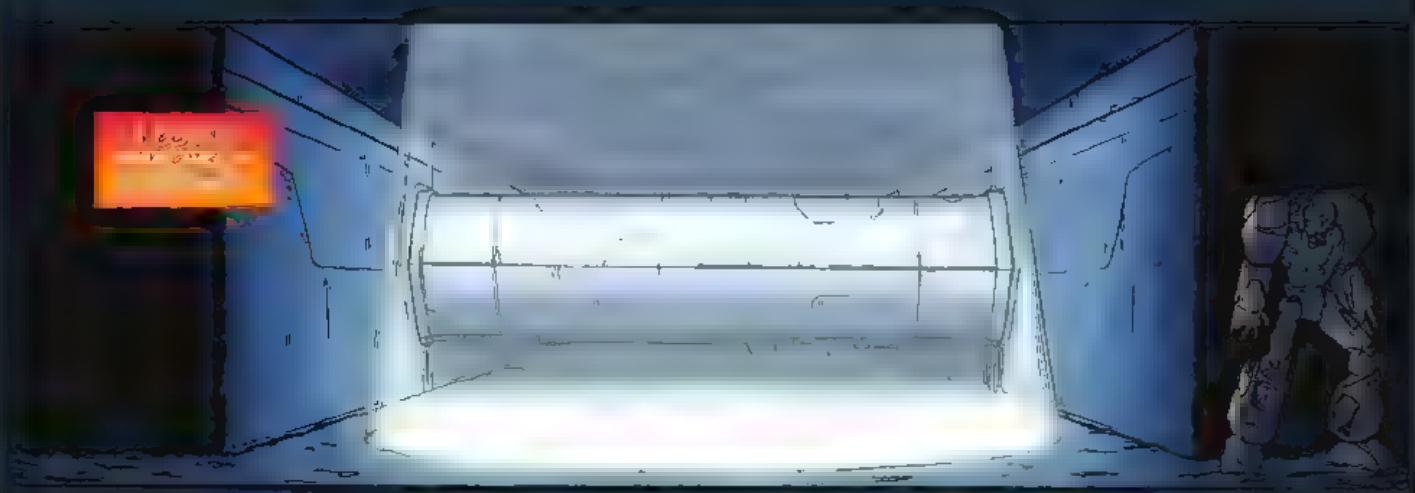


...NOT IN MY VOCABULARY.

TNK







HOLOMATTER
PROGRAM
RUNNING. WE...
ARE IN THE
TUBE!

SOME OF US
MORE LITERALLY
THAN OTHERS.

THE GUARDIANS?

SO FAR SO UNMOVED. LET'S
SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN, IN
ADDITION TO SIMULCRUMS...

...WE THROW IN
SOME FIREWORKS!

WE HAVE THEIR ATTENTION.

I'VE SWITCHED THE PROGRAM TO A RESPONSIVE SUB-ROUTINE, WHICH MEANS—WHEN FIRED UPON—THE SIMULCRUMS WILL TAKE REALISTIC EVASIVE ACTION

BUT, BY THE SAME TOKEN, IF THEY'RE HIT...

...THEY'RE GONE.

VAAAAT

ONE DOWN.

THREE TO GO. EH?

WELL, WE'VE REACHED THE INNER CHAMBER. THE REST, DOWNLOAD...

...IS UP TO YOU!

I-I NEVER
IMAGINED.
IT'S... WELL,
MAGNIFICENT.

HOT ROD, THIS...
FEELS WRONG. I
JUST... CAN'T—

THING IS, THE DECEPTICONS CAN... AND,
ACCORDING TO OUR INTEL, WILL. AND IF THE
MAGNIFICENCE TRULY IS SOME KIND OF ALL-SEEING
ORACLE, THEY'LL HAVE A ROADMAP TO EVERYTHING
EXPLOITABLE IN THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE!

OUR JOB... IS TO
KEEP IT FROM
TEMPTATION.

RIGHT... YEAH
SORRY. HERE GOES...

HOT ROD!
THE HOLOMATTER
GENERATOR, IT'S...

WOOOM

GIZMO?



WAMPI WAWPE - WAWE

THE VIRUS POPS EVERY CELL DOOR

THIS IS A
CODE-NINE. I
REPEAT...

Z-LATERAL IS QUIET, THE
ACCIDENTS EITHER UNAWARE
IT'S ANYTHING MORE THAN A
POLITICAL SPOT INSPECTION

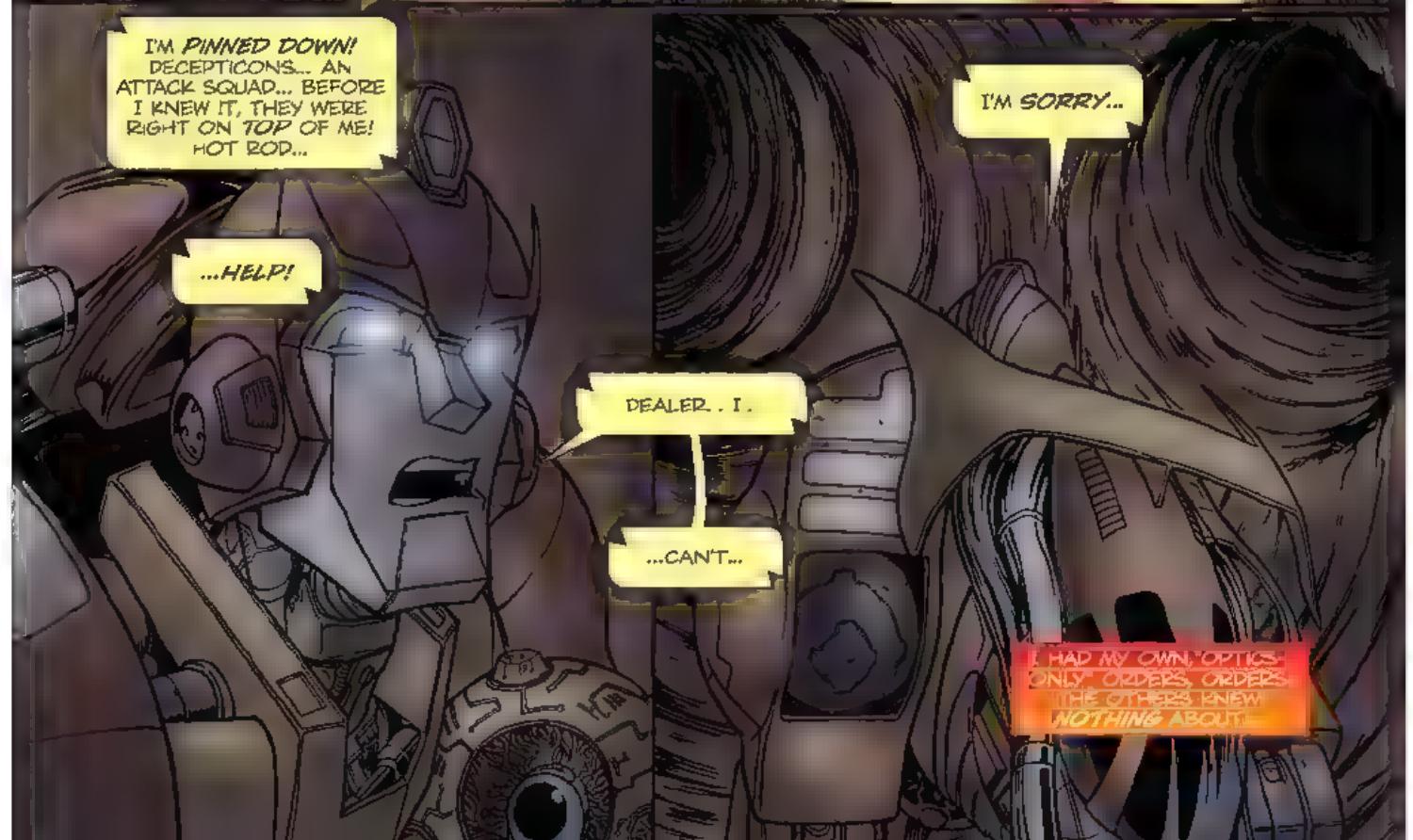
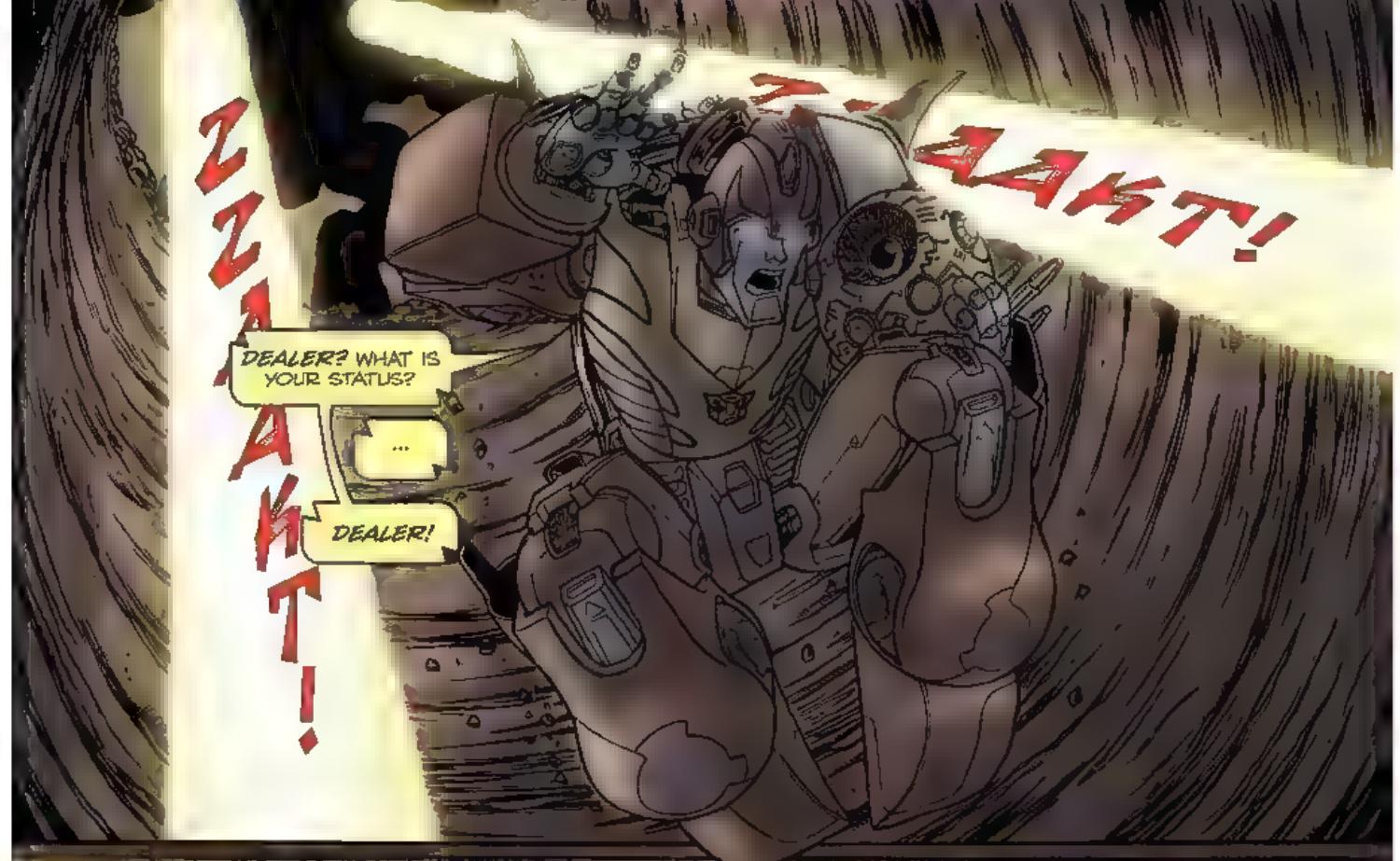
OR JUST TOO WEAK
OR BROKEN TO TAKE

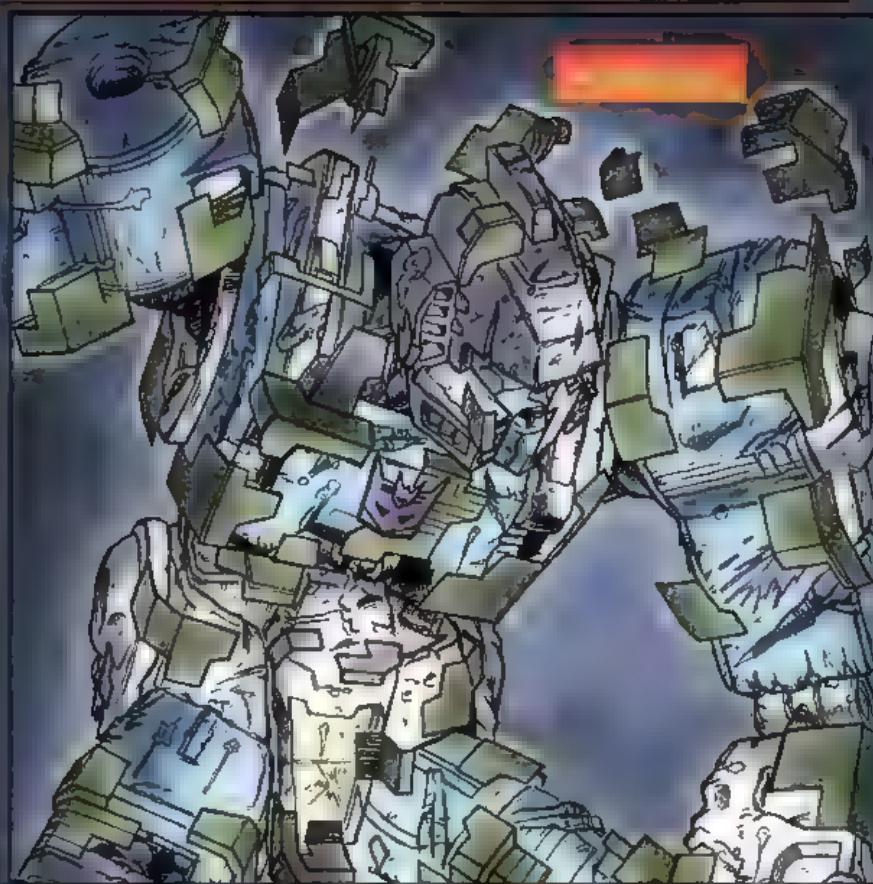
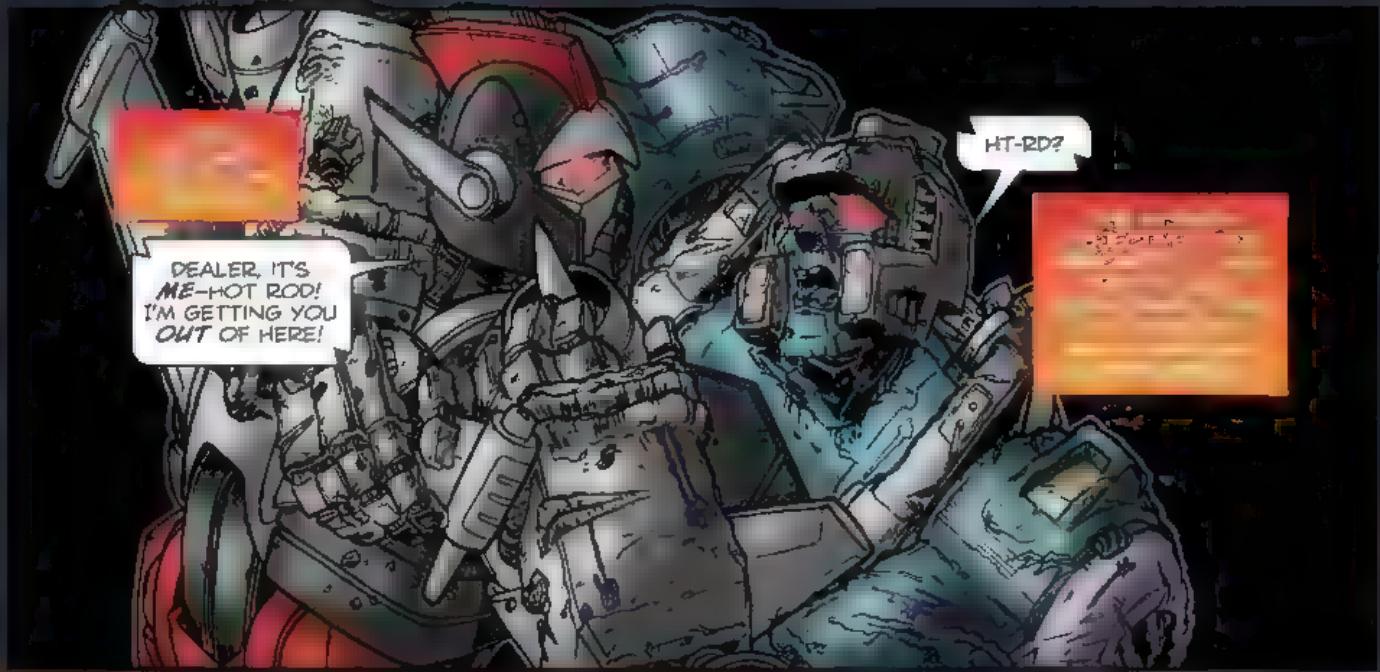
THEY DON'T GET IT
THEY DON'T GET IT

INSTEAD, I FOCUS ON HIM. WHEN WORD FIRST REACHED ME THAT

HE WAS BRINGING

"DEALER?"





THE OFFICIAL INCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORT PUT THE BLAME FIRMLY ON AN UNSECURED COMM CHANNEL AND A DEFECTIVE HOLOMATTER POWER CELL.

BUT IT WAS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO DOUBLE-CHECK THE MISSION ORDNANCE AND SECURITY INTERLOCKS.

THOUGH NOBODY EVER ACTUALLY POINTED THE FINGER...

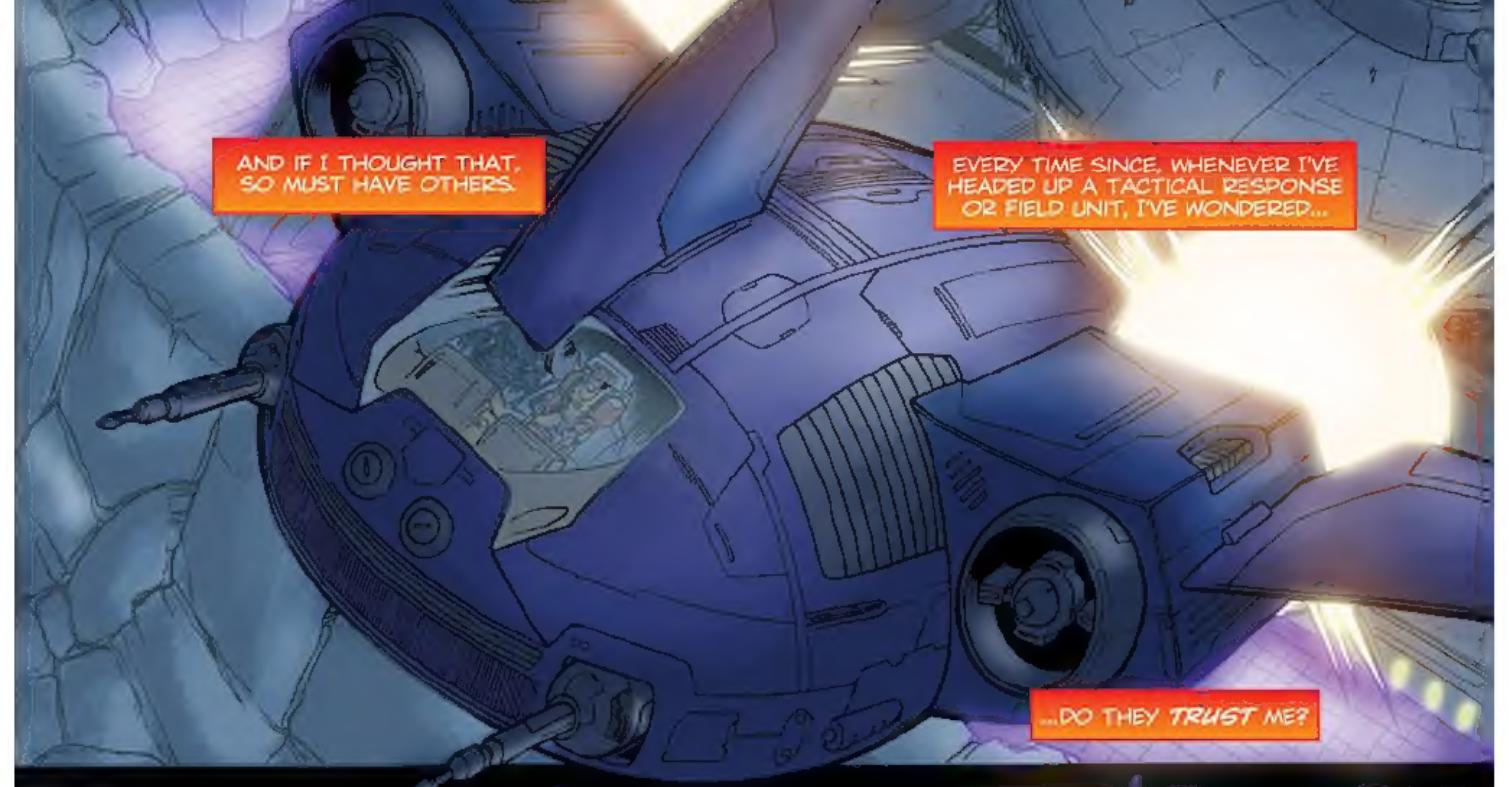
WAIT HERE...

...THE BUCK STOPPED WITH ME.

WHAT THE FR-

SURPRISE!

BLAMM



AND IF I THOUGHT THAT,
SO MUST HAVE OTHERS.

EVERY TIME SINCE, WHENEVER I'VE
HEADED UP A TACTICAL RESPONSE
OR FIELD UNIT, I'VE WONDERED...

...DO THEY TRUST ME?



DO I TRUST MYSELF?



THAT'S WHY, IF IT'S AN
OPTION, I PREFER TO GO
SOLO. IF I MESS UP, IT'S ME
PAYS THE PRICE. JUST ME.

BUT IT GETS
LONELY-OUT HERE.



MAYBE, JUST MAYBE...



I'VE FOUND A
WAY BACK.

DEALER'S OUT OF IT FOR THE WHOLE RETURN JOURNEY. IT ISN'T UNTIL NEARLY A DECA-CYCLE LATER...

...THAT I GET TO SAY MY PIECE.

UH...

I'M, WELL...

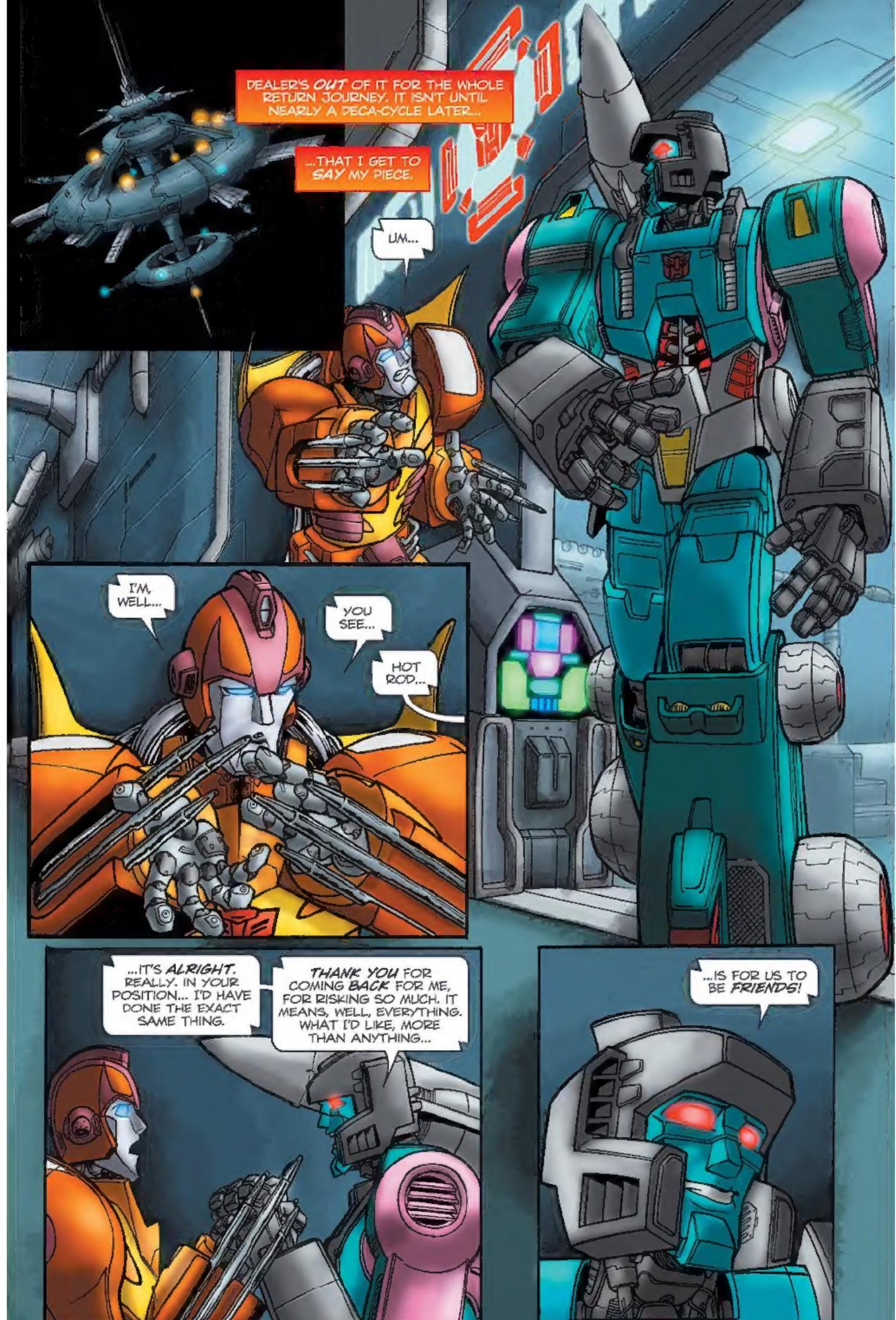
YOU SEE...

HOT ROD...

...IT'S ALRIGHT.
REALLY. IN YOUR POSITION... I'D HAVE
DONE THE EXACT SAME THING.

THANK YOU FOR
COMING BACK FOR ME,
FOR RISKING SO MUCH. IT
MEANS, WELL, EVERYTHING.
WHAT I'D LIKE, MORE
THAN ANYTHING...

...IS FOR US TO BE FRIENDS!



WELL?

DOESN'T SUSPECT A THING. AS FAR AS HOT ROD'S CONCERNED, I'M THE VICTIM OF A TRAGIC SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

HE'S FAIRLY DRIPPING WITH GUILT AND REMORSE, SEES THE WHOLE KI-ALETA MESS AS VERY MUCH OF HIS OWN MAKING.

I WONDER HOW HE'D REACT...

"...IF HE KNEW IT WAS ALL DOWN TO ME."

HOT ROD... HELP!

"EVERYTHING, FROM THE SABOTAGED POWER CELL TO THE SHAM AMBUSH. THANKS TO ME, THE MISSION WAS COMPROMISED BEFORE IT EVEN BEGAN, AND—if not for HOT ROD's UNEXPECTED SWITCH PLAY..."

...YOUR SECRET SERVICE WOULD HAVE THE MAGNIFICENCE, AND I WOULD BE VERY WELL OFF INDEED!

INDEED, AND YET—ALL THIS TIME LATER—NEITHER OF US HAS WHAT WE WANT.

HA! I CAN SEE I MUST WATCH YOU... VERY CAREFULLY! PERHAPS, FROM NOW ON, I SHOULD CALL YOU...

...DOUBLE DEALER!

AH, BUT HOT ROD OWES ME, OR THINKS HE DOES. I CAN EXPLOIT THAT. IN TIME, AS THE TRUST BUILDS, I RECKON I CAN GET HIM TO TELL ME EXACTLY WHERE HE STASHED THE MAGNIFICENCE.

AND THEN, BANZAITRON—IT'S ALL YOURS!

THE END?